

**MONTANA BUSINESS ENTERPRISE PROGRAM
FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED**

FACT SHEET

MONTANA BLIND VENDOR PROGRAM The Montana Business Enterprise Program (MBEP) is an effective **business development resource** for blind and visually impaired persons in Montana. Operated by the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS), it provides licensed blind vendors with a preference for the operation of vending facilities on state and federal properties. Authorized by the federal Randolph-Sheppard Act of 1936, and the Montana Blind Vendors Act of 1981, MBEP is designed to provide a hand-up, not a handout to blind and visually impaired citizens of Montana.

PURPOSE MBEP's purpose is to provide **opportunities for blind and visually impaired persons to become independent and self-sufficient through the management of a profitable business enterprise of their own.** The types of businesses developed and operated include vending machine routes and snack bar and other food service operations.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION MBEP consists of **small, franchised businesses** operated by licensed blind vendors that provide vending and other food services on federal, state and other properties under the jurisdiction of the Blind and Low Vision Services program (BLVS) in DPHHS.

PROGRAM GOALS (1) Create a total of 12-15 full-time vending and management positions for blind and visually impaired Montanans and up to 20 part-time jobs by 2012; (2) Manage a system that provides for the fair and efficient administration of vending facilities on state properties; and (3) Generate **revenues** sufficient to cover 75% of management, administrative and overhead costs of the program.

LICENSED BLIND VENDORS MBEP vendors are **trained and skilled professionals** dedicated to providing the highest quality products and services to their customers. To become a licensed blind vendor, an individual must be legally blind and undergo an intensive 3 to 6-month training program that involves classroom, field, and on-the-job training. (It is important to note that for most MBEP vendors, this is the first real job they have had and for many it is their only real source of income, aside from state and federal support.)

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT Responsibility for the program in state government resides with DPHHS, which in turn has contracted with Montana Business Enterprises, Inc., a not-for-profit corporation, to serve as its "nominee" agency to manage day-to-day program management and provide business, financial and technical support to blind vendors.

FINANCING **Licensed blind vendors and state and federal governments**

cooperatively fund the program. Currently, DPHHS funds about 50% of management and administrative costs and provides startup funding for new vending operations. The balance of funding comes from lease and commission payments paid by non-blind vendors operating on state and federal properties managed by MBEP, and grants and contributions from private, non-profit sources.

PROGRAM RESULTS ***Jobs:*** Since 2002, MBEP has employed a total of 12 blind persons as full-time vending operators and some 30 sighted persons as part-time driver-assistants. In addition, MBEI employs two full-time management employees (one of whom is blind) and a part-time operations manager (also blind).

Vending Operations: MBEP currently has four active licensed vendors who operate vending machine routes in Billings, Helena, and Missoula, and a snack bar facility in the Bozeman Federal Building. MBEP also employs a blind person not yet formally enrolled in the program to operate the snack bar in the Missoula Federal Building. During FY 2006, blind vendors realized **total sales of \$267,789** from the operation of 196 vending machines and one snack bar, and approximately **\$50,000 in net profits.**

State Vending Site Administration: MBEP administers vending facilities on 70 state properties, which contain 263 vending machines. Commission and lease payments from non-blind vendors operating these sites generated \$35,904 in revenues in FY 2006, an increase of almost 62 percent over the previous fiscal year, which paid for over one-third of MBEP management and administrative costs during the fiscal year.

New Vendor Training: During the past fiscal year, MBEP trained two new vendors, one of whom has already been placed in a facility. Four more vendors have been trained and licensed but not yet placed due to a lack of resources with which to acquire necessary equipment. Finally, MBEP expects to license another vendor for operation of a snack bar facility on a state property in the Helena area beginning in the summer of 2007.

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